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AUTHOR	Hill, Clifford A.
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ABSTRACT

During the past two decades the educational community has focused much attention on the language of urban minority children. Analytic positions set forth tend to assume varying degrees of either language deficit or language differences. The language deficit position is examined in this work from a sociolinguistic or psycholinguistic point of view. Among the lines of criticism pursued are several which have already been established by proponents of the language difference position. These include charges that language deficit proponents have used invalid criteria in evaluating the oral performance of urban minority students, and have failed to investigate the actual repertoire of verbal skills that these students exercise in everyday communication. A psycholinguistic criticism also levelled by the language difference proponents holds that the others have assumed that nonstandard forms of language reflect deficient forms of cognition. Pursued in depth in this document is another psycholinguistic criticism. This holds that language deficit proponents have assumed an inadequate theory of reference in evaluating the language of urban minority students. Specifically, they have not taken into account the holistic functions of oral language and the dynamic nature of language form. Neither have they recognized that the referential functions of lexical forms are established only in an immediate context, and that lexical forms of language may be considered as possessing deictic and nondeictic functions. (Author/GC)

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A Review of the Language Deficit Position:
Some Sociolinguistic and Psycholinguistic Perspectives

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Clifford A. Hill
Teachers College, Columbia University

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In the past two decades the educational community has focused a great deal of attention on the language of minority children, particularly those who are members of poor families in urban areas. Although many positions have been set forth, all tend to assume varying degrees of either *language deficit* or *language difference*. Cazden has distinguished these two positions in the following way:

> Either [urban minority children] have acquired less language than middle class . . . children or they have acquired a different language. The "less language" explanation has been given various names — cultural deprivation, deficit hypothesis, vacuum ideology — all with the same connotation of a non-verbal child somehow emptier of language than his more socially fortunate age-mates. The "different language" explanation is forcefully argued by William Stewart and Joan Baratz . . . . It states that all children acquire language but that many children, especially... lower class black children, acquire a dialect of English so different in structural . . . features that communication in school, both oral and written, is seriously impaired by that fact alone. (1970:35-36)

A considerable literature has been generated by the debate between proponents of these two positions. Although much of this debate has been useful, some of it has blurred basic issues. It has, at times, been conducted within a strictly linguistic framework not complemented by sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives. In general, it has been tied too closely to a discussion of surface forms of language rather than to their underlying social and cognitive functions. It is therefore important that in reviewing these positions, we adopt, wherever possible, a sociolinguistic or a psycholinguistic point of view. As a consequence of this orientation, our focus will not be so much on overt conflicts between the two positions as on the underlying assumptions of each. In this article, we will review the language deficit position, and, in a separate article to follow in this series, we will examine the language difference position.

Review of Language Deficit Position

The language deficit position has had a much greater impact on educational policy than has the language difference position. It has often served as a rationale for educational programs on a national scale. It has been used, for example, as a justification for massive programs such as DISTAR, Operation Headstart, and Project Followthrough. All these programs have reflected, in one form or another, the same assumption: since urban minority children come to school with poorly developed language skills, they must be provided, early on, with language enrichment.

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A longer version of the article, entitled "Urban Minority Students, Language, and Reading" is published as Number 51 in the ERIC/CUE Urban Diversity Series and as Number 55 in the CAL•ERIC/CLL Series on Languages and Linguistics. In this longer version a counterposition is developed to the language deficit one, particularly, as the title suggests, with respect to reading problems of urban minority students.

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In the educational setting of the late 1960's, the most outspoken advocates of the language deficit approach were Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann. They attempted to relate their own approach to the extensive body of sociolinguistic theory that Basil Bernstein was evolving, at the time, at the Institute of Education of the University of London. Bernstein's own thinking was quite complex, involving sociological and psychological components as well as a linguistic one. Furthermore, his thinking was in a constant state of change throughout the 1960's. However a distinction between two codes of communication was, at all points, fundamental to his approach. And it was these two codes, most commonly referred to as *restricted* and *elaborated*, that many researchers, including Bereiter and Engelmann, drew on and often misapplied.

This misapplication was, to some degree, motivated by Bernstein's own choice of labels, for the contrast between the words "restricted" and "elaborated" suggests, at least in ordinary speech, that the restricted code is, in some way, intrinsically inferior. Bernstein had been careful, however, to emphasize that each code was a perfectly natural, well-adapted mechanism for transmitting information appropriate to a particular communicative setting. Indeed, the use of an elaborated code in a setting marked for a restricted one would be just as inappropriate as the use of a restricted code in a setting marked for an elaborated one.

Although Bernstein and his associates characterized communicative settings in a number of ways, they consistently called attention to certain dimensions which may be represented in the following set of scales (the first three scales measure dimensions reflected in the social character of the setting, the second three dimensions reflected in the character of the information transmitted in the setting):

1. Degree of formality in the setting — Low — High
2. Degree of social heterogeneity among the participants — Low — High
3. Degree to which the participants do not draw upon common experience — Low — High
4. Degree to which the verbalized information reflects more than the participants' everyday world of experience — Low — High
5. Degree to which the verbalized information reflects abstract domains of reference — Low — High
6. Degree to which the verbalized information reflects an explicit formulation of internal dimensions of experience (values, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, etc.) — Low — High

In general, the more a particular communicative setting reflects relatively high readings on the above scale, the more elaborated the code that its participants use; and the more it reflects relatively low readings, the more restricted the code that its participants use.

In addition, Bernstein and his associates characterized the linguistic features of the two codes in a number of different ways, but, again, a relatively stable set of features may be isolated: the elaborated code reflects a wider range of vocabulary (particularly items with abstract domains of reference); it exhibits greater syntactic complexity (i.e., sentences that encode more extensive bodies of information with explicit markers of coordination and subordination); it makes greater use of cohesive ties between sentences (i.e., lexical and grammatical elements that link sentences explicitly); it depends less on deictically anchored forms of language such as *this, that*, etc. (i.e., words whose meaning is dependent upon the immediate point of view of the participants in the communicative situation).

Bernstein argued that members of all social classes have access to both codes, but that members of the middle and upper social classes tend to make greater use of an elaborated code. In the first place, their patterns of socialization contribute to this greater use. Elaborate forms of verbal interaction are encouraged between adults and children: for example, parents tend to provide more explicit statements of explanations, reasons, and values in dealing with their children. Moreover, members of the middle and upper classes participate in a much wider range of communicative settings in which exact forms of information must be transmitted (e.g., arranging for air travel by telephone). As a consequence, they become accustomed to drawing upon a code that is, in Bernstein's phrase, "more universalistic and context-independent."

Bernstein argued that, by contrast, the lesser social mobility of members of the lower classes limits the range of communicative settings in which they can participate. They tend to communicate more frequently in settings where they share with the other participants an extensive body of experience. As a consequence, they become accustomed to drawing upon this common experience in a code that is, to use Bernstein's phrase, "more particularistic and context-dependent." However, Bernstein, unlike certain researchers who claimed to use his approach, was careful to point out that just as members of middle and upper classes tend to use a more restricted code in certain settings (e.g., within the family where a history of shared experience is drawn upon), so members of lower classes tend to use a more elaborated code in certain settings (e.g., on a job interview where there is virtually no such history). Hence Bernstein viewed the two codes as possessing distinct but overlapping patterns of distribution in social space.[1]

In taking over Bernstein's functional distinction between restricted and elaborated codes, researchers such as Bereiter and Engelmann oversimplified it considerably. First of all, they assumed that an elaborated code is intrinsically superior to a restricted one. They did not, like Bernstein,

evaluate the codes according to the communicative setting in which they function. Secondly, they overlooked the other aspect of Bernstein's position that we have just noted, namely, that members of all social classes have potential access to both codes. Bereiter and Engelmann, for the most part, applied the distinction between the two codes categorically: urban minority students, as members of a lower class, make use of a restricted code that contrasts with the elaborated code used by members of middle and upper classes. They supported this claim by citing extensive interviews they conducted with preschool black children. Bereiter, for example, claimed that the language of these children consists primarily of "gestures," "single words," and "a series of badly connected words or phrases." He concluded that "the language of culturally deprived children is not merely an underdeveloped version of standard English, but it is a basically non-logical mode of expressive behavior" (1966:113).

In a language arts curriculum designed by Bereiter and Engelmann (1966), the teacher is advised to proceed "as if the children had no language at all." For example, if the children respond to the question, *Where is the book?* with the "nonlogical" form *on the table*, the teacher is asked to make them replace it with the "logical" form, *The book is on the table*. It was claimed that persistent use of such "logical form" in speech would prepare the child for processing the "formal properties [of written language] necessary for the organization of thought (1966:113). Such an extreme language deficit approach has been discredited, time and time again, for its naïveté. This naïveté need not be belabored here, but let us briefly review major criticisms of the language deficit position — two sociolinguistically based and one psycholinguistically based — that have been advanced by proponents of the language difference position. Following this review, we will then develop in much greater detail a second psycholinguistically based criticism — one much more oriented toward constructive processes involved in reading comprehension — which has not been set forth, at least not in a highly explicit form, by proponents of language difference.

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Sociolinguistic Criticisms of the Language Deficit Position

Proceeding from a sociolinguistic point of view, proponents of language difference have argued that the language deficit position was based on invalid criteria in its evaluation of the oral performance of minority students in the various domains of their everyday life. Language deficit researchers have tended to observe the children in artificial settings rather than natural ones. Within these settings, the children often perceive that whatever they say might work against them and, as a matter of communicative competence, tend to say as little as possible and preferably nothing at all. As Labov has pointed out with reference to the interviewing conducted by these researchers,

> thousands of these interviews are used as evidence of the child's total verbal capacity, or more simply his "verbality"; it is argued that this lack of verbality explains his poor performance in school. Operation Headstart and other intervention programs have largely been based upon the "deficit theory" — the notion that such interviews give us a measure of the child's verbal capacity and that verbal stimulation which he has been missing can be supplied in a pre-school environment. (1970:158)

Labov's own research showed that the same minority children who were "nonverbal" in an interview setting turned out to be highly verbal when interacting with each other and a trusted minority interviewer in informal settings:

> The monosyllabic speaker who had nothing to say about anything and cannot remember what he did yesterday has disappeared. Instead we have two boys who have so much to say they keep interrupting each other . . . . And we in turn obtain the volume of speech and the rich array of grammatical devices which we need for analyzing the structure of nonstandard Negro English. (1970)

Secondly, the language deficit researchers have not used sociolinguistically valid criteria in evaluating the language used by urban minority children in oral communication. They have viewed the oral language of these children as though it should reflect formal properties consonant with those of written language. Consider, for example, their claim that an answer such as *on the table* is a nonlogical response to a question such as *Where is the book?* Such a claim clearly denies sociolinguistic reality, for the omission of a linguistic element such as *the book is* reflects a pervasive feature of oral communication, namely, that a speaker tends not to repeat in a response information that has already been established in a question.

Indeed, such ellipsis is one of the most salient means of realizing the *socio*-logical form of conversation. The structure of conversation is a social product rather than the work of a single individual. It emerges as one person omits

some portion of his or her own language structure, thereby activating an apposite portion of the language structure of the interlocutor. As will be later observed in the psycholinguistic criticisms of the language deficit position, ellipsis, along with deixis, is a fundamental means of signaling that certain contextual information may be assumed as given. It may thus be viewed as a kind of social feedback, a listener's way of signaling that certain information has, indeed, been received and need not be repeated. As the original speaker monitors the listener's elliptical signal, he or she, may, in turn, respond in kind, thereby creating the interlocking patterns of ellipsis that constitute natural conversation.

In this sense, the logical bases of everyday conversation and formal writing contrast sharply: in the former, it is elaborated socially; in the latter, it is constructed individually. In the one instance, it is *dia*-logical and, in the other, *mono*-logical. As a consequence of this contrast, a certain lack of logic may thus be ascribed to the researchers rather than the children; for it is they who transferred criteria for evaluating language form from written prose to everyday conversation, a domain in which these criteria are not at all applicable. It is as if they were to describe a horse's body as deficient because it does not possess a pair of horns.

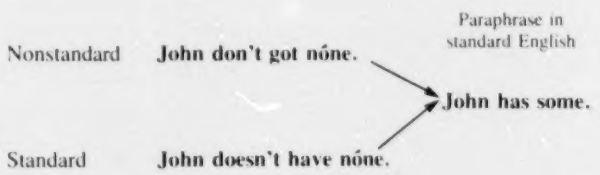
Psycholinguistic Criticisms of the Language Deficit Position

Let us now turn to the major psycholinguistically based criticism of the language deficit position that proponents of language difference set forth, the one directed at the assumption that nonstandard forms of language reflect deficient cognition. Bereiter and Engelmann held, for example, that a sentence such as *John don't got none* reflects a deficient understanding of the basic concepts of number and negation. The lack of an *es* (/z/) after *do*, and in the presence of two /n/-initiated markers of negation (*n't* and *none*) were taken as indicating a deficient understanding of these concepts.

This form of argument by the more extreme proponents of language deficit is particularly ironic, since certain of the minority speech patterns they call attention to can be perceived as representing more regular linguistic paradigms than the mainstream patterns. Consider, for example, the purported lack of number agreement represented by *John do*. From the strict point of view of internal consistency in language patterning, it is the mainstream form *John does* that is irregular. For the *(e)s* in the third person singular form represents the only instance in English in which the verb is marked for number agreement with the subject. Hence its omission in minority speech may be viewed as representing a more consistent patterning, one which appears in dialects of English in other parts of the world.

Equally naïve from a linguistic point of view is the argument that the nonstandard double marker of negation reflects deficient cognition. This argument makes the claim that nonstandard *John don't got none* is logically equivalent to a positive predication, paraphrasable in standard English as *John has some*. An even stronger form of this argument, occasionally sounded in language deficit circles, claims that nonstandard speakers, by virtue of this equivalence, do not manage to express a proper concept of negation even as they communicate with each other.

A number of criticisms have been made of these claims by proponents of language difference. As Labov (1970) points out, if a nonstandard speaker wishes to use a double marker of negation to express the logical equivalence of the standard *John has some*, he does exactly what the standard speaker does — he places contrastive stress on *none*:



However, in the absence of contrastive stress on *none* (used only when it has been already presupposed in some way that John, indeed, has none), the nonstandard sentence is, in fact, logically equivalent to the standard *John doesn't have any*. In effect, unstressed *none* in nonstandard English is equivalent to unstressed *any* in standard English. Each contrasts with *some* in the corresponding positive predication. In its contrast to *some*, standard *any*, as much as nonstandard *none*, may be considered a marker of negation. Hence the standard sequence *not . . . any*, as well as the nonstandard sequence *not . . . none*, may be considered as realizing a double marker of negation.[2]

Language difference proponents have made a further criticism of the more extreme claim that speakers of nonstandard English fail to express negation properly to each other. It is evident that not only do they express negation quite clearly to each other, but to speakers of standard English as well. In the absence of stress on *none*, it is difficult to imagine speakers of standard English interpreting nonstandard *John don't got none* as *John has some*. For it is clear that speakers of standard English possess a receptive competence with respect to this feature of nonstandard English, just as speakers of nonstandard English possess a receptive competence with respect to many features of standard English. We are not suggesting, however, that the receptive competence of standard speakers for nonstandard speech is well developed in all instances. As we will observe in the article to follow, a major problem that urban minority students face in schools is the failure of their teachers to understand certain basic patterns of their speech.

Having established this brief overview of the major criticisms of the language deficit position by proponents of language difference, let us now turn to a second psycholinguistically based criticism, the one which, as we have already pointed out, has not hitherto been developed explicitly. This criticism is directed at the language deficit researchers' use of an inadequately conceived theory of reference in evaluating the language performance of urban minority students. Many proponents of language deficit, whose views are not as extreme as those of Bereiter and Engelmann, have claimed that the communicative code of these students necessarily conveys less meaning because it

is more deictically anchored in the immediate context. They have claimed that the apparently greater reliance of urban minority students on deictic forms such as *it, one, this, that, here,* and *now* indicates a general inability to formulate and express explicit forms of meaning. In staking out this position, language deficit proponents have assumed that deictic forms of language, in contrast to lexically explicit forms, convey less meaning because they possess less semantic content. The use of *that,* for example, may indicate "greater distance" (psychological as well as physical), by virtue of its potential contrast with *this.* And it may convey the notion of singularity by virtue of its potential contrast with the plural form *those.* But any more detailed meaning for *that* can only be derived from immediate context. In one context, *that* may refer to some object such as a button in the physical environment:

> Hey, *that's* what I've been looking for.

In another context, however, it may refer to a proposition in the verbal environment:

> My paper is due tomorrow. *That's* why I won't get any sleep tonight.

As a consequence, its meaning is always context-bound and particularistic, limited to the immediate point of view of the participants in the speech situation.

Language deficit proponents have argued, concomitantly, that lexically explicit forms of language possess a more clearly delineated semantic content and consequently may be used to talk about the world with much greater precision. For example, the lexical item *button,* unlike deictic *that,* may refer only to a highly differentiated set of material objects in the real world. The lexical phrase *black button* refers to a more differentiated set, the expanded lexical phrase *big black button* to an even more differentiated set, and so on. It has thus been concluded that the person who uses lexically explicit forms of language is able to render his experience of the world with greater clarity, producing meaning that is context-free and universalistic rather than context-bound and particularistic. It is as if, by virtue of greater lexical specificity, a person is liberated from his own immediate perspective.

Before examining this position in some detail, let us consider two frequently cited examples that show contrast between lexically explicit and deictically anchored forms of language across social classes. We shall first examine material drawn from research by Hawkins (1969) on the ways in which visually mediated information is represented verbally by middle-class and lower-class five-year-old children in London. Within a school setting, members of these two groups were presented with four pictures which showed, in turn, some boys playing with a football next to a house; the football going through the window; a man gesturing wildly; and the children running away while a woman looks out the window. Hawkins constructs two versions of the stories which he claims are representative of the disparate styles of verbal communication of the two groups. The first version represents the middle-class style, the second the lower-class style.

1. Three boys are playing football and one kicks the ball — and it goes through the window — the ball breaks the window — and the boys are looking at it — and a man comes out and shouts at them — because they've broken the window — so they ran away — and then that lady looks out of her window — and she tells the boys off.
2. They're playing football — and he kicks it and it goes through there — it breaks the window and they're looking at it — and he comes out and shouts at them — because they've broken it — so they run away — and then she looks out and she tells them off. (1969:127)

The middle-class version is, for the most part, lexically explicit: it uses deictic pronominals only where lexical antecedents are clearly established (e.g., *three boys/they, that lady/she*). The lower-class version, however, is much less lexically explicit. *Three boys* and *that lady* are not used at all; rather *they* and *she* are introduced without lexical antecedents.

The second set of examples is drawn from research by Hess and Shipman (1966) in the black community of Chicago, in which they describe variations in mother-child verbal styles of interaction across social class. In the presentation of their data, they include recorded excerpts of mothers explaining the same task to their children, one designed "to teach . . . how to group or sort a small number of toys." More specifically, the mothers are to teach the children to use color as the criterion for sorting the toys. The following pair of excerpts are presented as representing the contrasting verbal styles of middle-class and lower-class mothers.

1. First of all, you're supposed to learn how to place them according to color. Can you do that? The things that are all the same color you put in one section; in the other section you put another group of colors, and in the third section you put the last group of colors.
2. All right, just put them right here; put the other one right here; all right, put the other one there. (1966:881)

Again, it may be observed that the middle-class speech is more lexically explicit, the lower-class speech more deictically anchored.

It is the kind of contrast represented by these two sets of examples that is generally taken as evidence that members of the middle and upper social classes tend to talk about the world in a more lexically explicit way. It is argued that they are thereby liberated from their own immediate point of view, expressing more universalistic modes of meaning. On the other hand, members of the lower social classes are viewed as talking about the world in a more deictically anchored way. It is argued that they are thereby limited to their own immediate point of view, expressing, as it were, more particularistic modes of meaning. As Hess and Shipman put it, in summarizing the findings of their own study, "the meaning of deprivation is a deprivation of meaning" (1966:885).

The position taken in the above studies, each frequently cited in sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic literature, is, on the surface, a quite respectable one; yet it is based on an inadequate conceptualization of the ways in which information is represented verbally in human communication. A full criticism of this conceptualization requires more space than we have available here. We would like, however, to con-

sider four fundamental characteristics of language that have not been adequately dealt with by the researchers who hold this position (the first two are more concerned with the functions of deictic forms, the second two with the functions of lexical forms):

1. Language functions as only a single channel in a multichanneled oral system that represents information holistically.
2. The form of verbal representation necessarily changes so as to reflect a continuous monitoring of the status of the information it represents.
3. The referential functions of lexical forms as well as deictic forms are established only in an immediate context, whether it is mediated verbally or nonverbally.
4. Lexical forms of language may possess contrasting referential functions characterized as deictic and nondeictic.

Let us consider each of these characteristics in turn. The argument that deictically anchored language necessarily carries less meaning presupposes that the linguistic channel functions alone — apart from the paralinguistic and nonlinguistic ones — when, in reality, these channels together form a holistic system. In order to illustrate this point, let us consider once again responses to the question *Where's the book?* A deictically anchored response like *right here* is rarely given without an accompanying nonlinguistic one. A hand gesture, for example, might signal the book's location with a degree of exactitude not to be found in an act of communication consisting only of the lexically explicit form *on the table*.

A lexically explicit response, of course, may be accompanied by a hand gesture as well. But it appears that, in general, deictically anchored language is accompanied by a richer array of nonverbal and paraverbal signals than lexically explicit language. Upon using deictically anchored language, a speaker tends, as a matter of communicative instinct, to supply contextual information by means of nonverbal and paraverbal cues; and the listener, upon hearing deictically anchored language, instinctively searches for these cues. Furthermore, it appears that certain information, particularly that which is provided by the immediate physical environment, is represented more efficiently by conjoining deictically anchored language with nonverbal and paraverbal cues. Indeed, an understanding of how deixis links the verbal code to nonverbal and paraverbal codes restores to us the core meaning that the word originally possessed in Greek, namely, "a pointing toward."

Let us now turn to our second point, namely, that the form of language is continuously modified in order to signal whether the information that it represents is to be viewed as "old" (i.e., the sender of the information assumes that it is already present in some form in the communicative setting and that the receiver is in a position to retrieve it) or "new" (i.e., the sender of the information assumes that it is not present in the communicative setting — at least not in a form that can be retrieved by the receiver). This monitoring of the status of information would appear to be one of the most basic functions of language (and, for that matter, of any information-processing system), for all natural languages possess abundant resources for fulfilling it. Although these resources are highly varied, they may, in general, be considered as expressions of either ellipsis or deixis. Some portion of the linguistic signal may be reduced to "zero" (i.e., the process of ellipsis) or to a kind of "dummy element" (i.e., the process of deixis). Just as we may omit *the book is* in responding with *on the table* to the question *Where's the book?*, so we may say *right here* rather than *on the table*, when the table is immediately before the speaker and the hearer. In each instance, a reduction in the linguistic signal is stimulated by contextual information. In the case of *on the table*, information is located in the verbal environment; *the book is* is present in the preceding question. But the further reduction of *on the table* to *right here* signals that the speaker is assuming that he or she shares with the listener even further information, namely, the sensorially mediated information that the book is, indeed, on the table right before them.

In summary, the sender of a message uses the processes of ellipsis and deixis to reduce the linguistic surface in order to signal to the receiver that information being transmitted is, in some sense, old. Upon receiving an elliptical or deictic signal from the sender, the receiver, in turn, is required to contextualize it in order to retrieve information already present in the communicative environment. In this sense, ellipsis and deixis function as highly cohesive processes in verbal communication: They force the receiver to integrate continuously emerging information with information that has already accumulated.

Just as it was earlier claimed that elliptical forms of language are highly motivated in certain communicative situations, so it will now be claimed that deictic forms are equally highly motivated. Indeed, the failure to use some kind of deictic element to signal the presence of old information may be just as unnatural as the failure to omit *the book is* in responding to the question *Where's the book?* Consider, for example, the following two sentences:

> My wife got sick. *My wife's getting sick is* why I couldn't come to your party.

Given our notions of how sentences should fit together, the relation of the second sentence to the first is highly unnatural, for just the reason that it fails to exploit the presence of old information. Deictic *that* would naturally occur in place of *my wife's getting sick* in the second sentence:

> My wife got sick. *That's* why I couldn't come to your party.

By the same token, deictic forms of language are equally motivated when they represent information clearly accessible in the physical environment. Just as the first example above is unnatural, so it would be unnatural, in most situations, simply to say *on the table* in response to the question, *Where's the book?* when the book is lying in full view on a table immediately before the speaker and the hearer.[3]

In this instance, the speaker is motivated to use some kind of deictic expression, whether in isolation (e.g., *right*

here), or as part of a lexical phrase (e.g., *right here on the table*). In fact, we can observe such compounding of deictic and lexical forms in the examples of middle-class speech given earlier. In the middle-class version of the story given by Hawkins, the woman looking out the window is represented as *that lady* rather than *a lady*. From the strict point of view of information monitoring, the middle-class children represented her in the same way as the lower-class children who used *she*. Both groups signaled by their choice of language that the identity of the woman could be taken as established, the first group using deictic *that* and the second using deictic *she*.

In presenting the information represented by *boys* and *man*, however, the middle-class version and the lower-class version do differ. The middle-class version introduces these participants as representing new information, the lower-class version as representing old information. This difference is not, however, a matter of more versus less meaning; it is rather a matter of whether or not a speaker decides to use language reflecting the fact that the listener too has access to the information he or she is representing verbally. Now it is clear that both the middle- and lower-class speakers had acquired the communicative competence by the age of five to use deictic forms in order to signal such access by the listener. Moreover, it is clear that they all knew that the person listening to their stories had such access. He was, after all, the person who was presenting the task of describing the pictures while they talked. In addition, he was physically present while each child talked and thus was in a position to observe what was in the pictures. The primary difference in the two communicative codes, then, would seem to lie in the different ways in which children in the two groups constituted the task. The middle-class children were apparently more aware that lexically explicit forms of language are preferred for the kinds of tasks constructed in a school setting. In other words, they had more access to school norms of language use, for one of the major characteristics of the school use of language is that a teacher seeks to elicit information that he or she already has. As the speech act theorist John Searle is fond of pointing out, many teacher questions are not real questions at all: from an illocutionary point of view, they are merely "exam questions." The student knows that the teacher already knows the answers. The student, nevertheless, accepts the conditions of the task and agrees to offer the answers himself or herself.

The description of a set of pictures in a school setting presents a similar situation. A student may be expected to treat the pictures as if they represent information that the teacher does not have, even though it is clear that the teacher does have it. Students not accustomed to this school norm, however, may instead exercise the communicative competence they use in everyday speech. They would thus use deictic forms of language to represent information to which the listener has clear access. No matter which strategy they choose, they do not necessarily sacrifice any meaning.

Indeed, the question may be raised as to whether, in certain instances, a lexically explicit form of language might carry less meaning. In the sample of speech by a middle-class mother taken from Hess and Shipman, the language was quite complex, particularly given the fact that an appropriate use of deixis could have simplified it. (Such complexity is quite commonly displayed by a middle-class mother when there is an adult audience or when her child's competence is in some way called into question.) Moreover, the language, in spite of its complexity (or perhaps because of it), did not represent the real world situation accurately. For example, the mother first says, "*the things that are all the same color you put in one section*," and then she says, "then in *the* other section you put another *group of colors*." There are three pieces of misleading information in her use of purportedly explicit language (each has been italicized). First, "the things that are all the same color" is a way of characterizing what goes into *each of the sections*, not merely *one section*. Her use of "one section" potentially stimulates a misleading inference, namely, that a separate group of objects, unlike in color, should be placed in another section. Secondly, the use of "*the* other section" in reference to the second section presupposes that there are only two, when in reality there are three; "another section" would have been a more accurate way of talking, although "the second section" might have fit better with the mother's larger pattern of discourse, since she uses "the third section" in the following sentence. Thirdly, she speaks of "another group of colors" when she intends to delimit a group of objects sharing another color. In other words, the mere fact that a mother is using lexically explicit forms of language with her child is no guarantee that she is talking about the world in a precise way.

It may, of course, be argued that such imprecisions would not have confused the child. In the first place, they would have been accessible only in a highly refined semantic universe, one, no doubt, that the child did not yet possess. Moreover, even if he had had access to these imprecisions, he could still have managed to construct what his mother intended to say. For such imprecisions abound in everyday speech, and an essential aspect of receptive competence is knowing how to construct what a person intends to say, even when a particular choice of words may be misleading. Just as contextual information is activated in order to process deictic elements, so it is activated in order to suppress misleading information; and the mother, no doubt, provided a great number of nonverbal and paraverbal cues that provided a context for what she was saying. It might be counterargued, however, that the receptive competence for such contextual information is less developed in children than in adults; for, in general, children are much more prone to follow misleading cues generated by the localized verbal context and thereby to draw inferences not warranted within the larger context that the communicative situation provides.

It may also be argued that the middle-class mother was, at least, trying to use language in a way that would lead her child to focus on the purpose of the task. In effect, she was pointing out the underlying principle on which the sorting was to be based. But then it may be counterargued that her explicit verbalizing merely deprived the child of the oppor-

tunity to arrive inductively at what the purpose of the sorting was. Given our limited knowledge of how learning takes place, we cannot be certain that it is not this kind of deprivation that Hess and Shipman should have studied. As Bruner points out, members of the middle class have been conditioned to believe, by virtue of their commitment to formal schooling, that learning takes place "out of the context of action, by means that are primarily symbolic." As a consequence, they may develop an excessive reliance on verbal mediation in learning tasks in everyday life, when such mediation is, in fact, often quite cumbersome. A great deal of everyday learning takes place in a context in which actions are more important than words. Yet middle-class styles of communication rely heavily on creating a context for learning by means of highly explicit talk, even when a sufficient context could be established by other means (e.g., observing a set of events or performing a sequence of actions). With respect to middle-class speech habits, Labov has rightly sounded the following note of caution:

> Before we impose middle class verbal style upon children from other cultural groups, we should find out how much is merely stylistic — or even dysfunctional. In high school and college, middle class students spontaneously complicate their syntax to the point that instructors despair of getting them to make their language simpler and clearer . . . . Is the elaborated code of Berstein really so "flexible, detailed and subtle" as some psychologists (i.e. Jensen, 1969) believe? (1970:163- 64)

There is one last argument to be raised with respect to the contrast in verbal styles reflected in the example drawn from the research by Hess and Shipman. Whether or not the middle-class mother's style is viewed as potentially "dysfunctional," it may still be argued that the lower-class mother's use of deictically anchored language is excessive. The speech that we have excerpted included three short sentences, and except for the verb *put* that occurred in each of the three, it contains no lexical forms. Rather it contains only pronominals such as *them* and *the other one*, locatives such as *right here* and *there*. In order to evaluate the degree to which these deictic forms are functional, it would be necessary to make further observations about what actually happens in the mother-child interaction. Ideally, two patterns of interaction should be observed:

1. what the child does in reponse to his mother's deictically anchored speech; if he does what she asks, then presumably he understands what she intends to communicate;
2. what happens between the mother and child after he has sorted the toys; if she manages to elicit from him what the purpose of the task was, her earlier use of deictic forms could be viewed as quite functional. For this initial lack of specification on her part would have permitted the child, after performing a series of actions, to verbalize for himself what the purpose of the task was.[4]

Within the domain of pedagogy, deictically anchored language may be used effectively by a teacher in order to preserve for the learner the task of explicit verbalization. As we have already pointed out with respect to the middle-class mother's verbal style, her child was deprived of the opportunity of verbalizing on his own what the purpose of the task was. The lower-class mother at least preserved, by virtue of her deictically anchored language, this opportunity for her child. It is important to remind ourselves that we cannot evaluate the degree to which deictic forms of language are functional, unless we consider the total pattern of human communication — actions as well as words — of which they are a part.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that everyday life does provide a continuous stream of deictically anchored language that is dysfunctional. In a great number of communicative situations, one person erroneously assumes that another has access to certain information. In effect, a person often speaks to another as if he were speaking to himself. As Vygotsky, the great Russian psycholinguist, was fond of observing, a person already knows, in his inner speech, what he is going to say: The very texture of human consciousness is to anticipate, at one moment, what will be present at the next. As a consequence, what a person says to himself is continuously represented as if it were already known and thereby is necessarily reduced in its fundamental structure.[5]

In the harried and preoccupied texture of everyday life, a person often assumes, when speaking to others, that they have access to what is at the center of his or her own consciousness; and so he or she inadvertently transfers certain reductive processes from inner speech to the social domain where they may not be at all appropriate. If a child, for example, has frequently talked to his mother about his efforts to run one hundred meters in less that fifteen seconds, he may return from school one day, after having told his mother that morning he would be running the one hundred-meter race during gym class, and exclaim, "Well, mommy, at last I've done it." The mother, preoccupied with cooking supper, reading to his sister, and helping his brother with homework, may look up and ask in bewilderment, "Done what?" The child has assumed that his mother shared with him, by virtue of their parting conversation that morning (and, of course, the endless talks that preceded it), a shared focus on his efforts to run one hundred meters in fifteen seconds. Indeed, the child's use of deictic *done it* may have been an attempt to establish symbolically the world of personal intimacy that he continuously seeks with his mother. For he may persistently use these forms as a means of signaling publicly that he views her as having continuous access to what his own personal concerns are. He badly misjudged, however, just what his mother's state of awareness was at the moment of his return. She was busily caught up in another world, one in which his one-hundred-meter race was not particularly salient.

There is a well-established body of research in social psychology providing evidence that children are, in fact, less able than adults to take into account their interlocutor's point of view in verbal communication (cf., Glucksberg, Krauss, & Higgins, 1975, for a thorough review of this research). For example, when two persons are placed on opposite sides of

a solid screen and are required to communicate about various placements of an array of objects which they each possess, children are more prone than adults to use deictically anchored language inappropriately.

Glucksberg, Krauss, and Weisberg (1966) report the following kind of conversation, where preschool children attempt to communicate with one another without visual contact:

> Speaker: It's a bird.
> Listener: Is this it?
> Speaker: No.

> Neither speaker nor listener in this case seemed to display any awareness of an important characteristic of their mutual situation — they could neither see one another nor see what they were each talking about. (1975:320)

Proponents of the language deficit position have cited certain studies within this body of research (Baldwin & Garvey, 1970; Heider, 1971; Krauss & Rotter, 1968) as providing support for their own claims that urban minority children, as members of lower social classes, are particularly dependent on their own point of view in verbal communication, are thereby more inclined to use deictic and elliptical forms of language inappropriately, and are thus prone to communicate "less meaning." However, as Glucksberg, Krauss, and Higgins observe in their review of this research, there are just as many studies that do not show social class differences as there are those that show them. For example, studies by Brent and Katz, 1967; Cowan, 1967; Higgins, 1973; Rackstraw and Robinson, 1967; and Ruth, 1966, have not, in general, shown social class difference. Moreover, as Glucksberg, Krauss, and Higgins caution with respect to any of these experimental findings,

> observed differences in communication skills associated with group membership can derive from a variety of factors that are irrelevant to the intrinsic abilities of speakers. Among them are differential familiarity with the stimulus materials employed, the reactive nature of experimental settings, and so on. Given the rudimentary state of our knowledge of the components of communication abilities, it should be clear that observed differences must be interpreted with great caution. (1975:325)

Let us now turn to the last two points in our critique of the theory of reference assumed by proponents of language deficit, those which are concerned more directly with the referential functions of lexical forms. These final criticisms are directed at a view of lexical forms which was, in general, not consciously worked out by proponents of language deficit. It was rather a view which they merely assumed, indeed necessarily assumed, given the simplistic way in which they contrasted the referential functions of deictic and lexical forms.

The first of these two points can be stated briefly: The proponents of language deficit tended to ignore the fact that lexical forms as well as deictic ones are dependent on immediate context for establishing meaning. In ignoring this dependence of lexical form, they were guilty of the ancient error of nominalism, locating meanings in words rather than the situations in which they are used. The meaning for any linguistic form, whether deictic or lexical, can be established only in a specific context. Consider, for example, the word *table* as opposed to the word *that*. Although *table* may refer potentially to a much more restricted set of entities than *that*, its actual referent is nevertheless determined by the situation in which it is used. It may, for example, refer to an entire class of entities:

> Does he know how to make a *table*?

or to a single one within that entire class:

> Sit down at the *table*.

In fact, if *table* is used in a situation in which it may refer to more than one entity, it alone cannot refer clearly to any one of them. Further information must be provided, whether mediated verbally (e.g., by saying the table next to the far wall) or nonverbally (e.g., by making a hand gesture) in order to identify just which entity is being referred to.

It is, of course, true that a lexical form possesses a more restricted semantic content than a deictic form. But this more restricted content does not mean that a lexical form is necessarily used with any greater precision. For as we have already suggested with reference to the middle-class mother's speech, a lexically explicit verbal style often reflects, when it is evaluated carefully, a great deal of imprecision. Such imprecision is not at all surprising; for it would appear that the more restricted the semantic content of a particular word, the more difficult it is to use that word in an exacting way.

Our final criticism of the theory of reference assumed by the proponents of language deficit is closely related to the preceding one. Not only did they fail to recognize that lexical forms are referentially dependent on immediate context, they also failed to recognize that such forms may reflect a contrasting set of functions that depend on whether or not the participants in a particular act of communication make use of their own immediate point of view. Indeed, linguists often describe these contrasting functions for lexically explicit forms of language with the terms "deictic" and "nondeictic." This more technical use of "deictic" in describing certain referential functions for lexically explicit forms should not be confused with the more general use of "deictic" that has been reflected in the article thus far, namely, as a term describing linguistic forms such as *that*. At the same time it is important to recognize that the word *deictic* does signify, in each of these uses, that participants are dependent upon their own immediate point of view in verbal communication.

In order to illustrate this distinction between deictic and nondeictic functions for lexical forms, let us borrow from Charles Fillmore an analogy based on contrasting modes of representing the human figure:

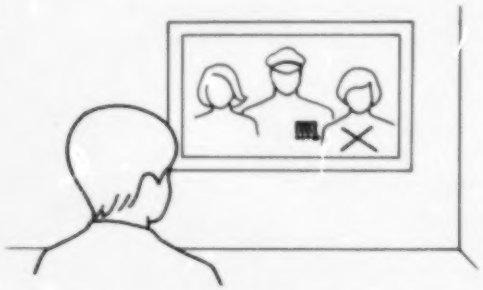
> Consider the difference between a sculptured representation of a human figure, set up in the middle of a courtyard, and a photograph of a human figure. The sculpture does not represent any particular observer's point-of-view, but the photograph does. The photograph does because the camera had to be positioned at a particular place in front of, or to the side of, above or below or on the same level as the model. (1975:16)

The sculptural representation may be viewed as nondeictic, the photographic representation as deictic.[6]

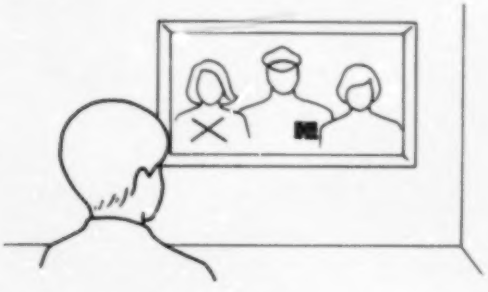
Fillmore goes on to point out that a lexical form such as *left*

> can have both non-deictic and deictic functions . . . . In a sentence like "My sister stood at the general's left side," we have an example of the non-deictic use of the word "left" . . . . Knowing what it means to stand at the general's left side requires knowing something about how a general's body is designed; it requires no special understanding at all about where the speaker is when he talks about it . . . . The situation is quite different for a sentence like "What's that shiny object over there, just to the left of the cypress tree?" In this second case, the location in space of the participants in the conversation is absolutely essential to an understanding of the question. (1975:16)

In certain instances, however, the lexical item *left* is used in a spatial construct that may be processed either deictically or nondeictically. Consider, for example, the sentence *My sister is to the left of the general*, one in which the spatial construct contains no *'s*-marking. The spatial construct may be processed nondeictically; that is to say, its referential function may be determined by a left-right axis not dependent on the participants' (i.e., the left-right axis in the *general's body*, the entity designated as the reference point in the spatial field):



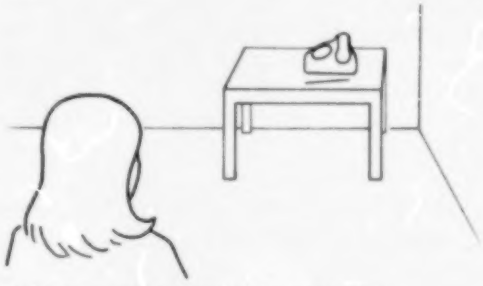
or it may be processed deictically; that is to say, its referential function may be determined by the participants' own left-right axis (i.e., the participants construct a spatial field in which the entity functioning as reference point, the general's body, is viewed as reflecting a left-right axis parallel to their own.[7]



Other lexically explicit spatial constructs reflect this same potential for deictic and nondeictic functions. Consider, for example, a spatial construct such as *in front of the telephone*. Such a construct may function nondeictically; that is to say, with its referential function determined by a front-back axis independent of the participants' own front-back axis (i.e., the intrinsically marked front-back axis of the telephone itself):

Is that your pen in front of the telephone?

or it may function deictically; that is to say, with its referential function determined by the participants' own front-back axis (i.e., the participants construct a spatial field in which the entity functioning as reference point, the telephone, is viewed as reflecting a front-back axis opposed to their own).[8]



Is that your pen in front of the telephone?

This potential contrast between deictic and nondeictic functions for lexically explicit forms of language is widespread in all natural languages, particularly in spatial and temporal constructs (Bennett, 1976). Consider, for example, the temporal construct *in an hour or so* in the sentence *I'll finish the work in an hour or so*. It may be processed as measuring a durational field not initiated in the *now*, the speaker's locus in *time* (i.e., as representing a certain length of time that may begin at any point). Such nondeictic processing of the construct responds, as it were, to the question *how long?* On the other hand, the temporal construct *in an hour or so* may be processed as measuring a durational field extending from the point in time at which the participants are located (i.e., as representing a temporal field initiated in the *now* of the speech situation). Such deictic processing of the construct responds, as it were, to the question *when?*

Research has recently been conducted to determine the degree to which minority and mainstream students in metropolitan New York ascribe deictic functions to certain lexically explicit forms of language (Hill, Donnell, Pearsons, & Aronowitz, in preparation). Both groups of students were given tasks

in which linguistic constructs were subject to deictic or non-deictic interpretations. The findings of this research cannot be reported in any detail here. In general, however, they are much like the findings of the research on use of immediate point of view in verbal communication reviewed by Glucksberg, Krauss, and Higgins: There appear to be no major differences in the degree to which members of the two groups respond with deictically anchored interpretations (i.e., those based on their own immediate point of view). Indeed, the differences that did emerge suggest that it may well be the mainstream students, not the minority ones, who are more inclined to deictic interpretations, at least on certain tasks, of lexically explicit forms of language involving spatial and temporal relations.

Even if further research were to establish that mainstream students do tend to make greater use of their own immediate point of view in processing certain lexical forms, this finding would not, of course, indicate that they are thereby communicating "less meaning" (the degree of meaning they communicate depends upon the degree to which their interlocutors have access to their code). Nor would it mean that these students make greater use of their own immediate point of view in other uses of language. As Ouspensky has pointed out in his classic studies on language use and point of view, there are so many different ways in which a participant in an act of verbal communication reflects his or her own immediate point of view (particularly as it manifests affective states) and since these manifold ways are, at present, so poorly understood, there is almost no reliable research on the ways in which immediate point of view is reflected in language use.

By the same token, if further research established that urban minority students do tend to make greater use of deictic forms such as *that*, this finding could not be used to support the claims of the proponents of language deficit that these students are more dependent on their own immediate point of view in verbal communication and thereby communicate less precise forms of meaning. To make these claims, it would be necessary to show that these students made greater use of deictic forms in communicative settings where the listener(s) did not have access to appropriate information for interpreting these forms. Once again, it would be more just to ascribe a certain lack of precision to the researchers rather than the students; for it is they who have failed to understand the complex ways in which referential functions are established for deictic forms in verbal communication.

Finally, it should be pointed out that, even if further research were to indicate that urban minority students do tend to make greater use of deictic forms in communicative settings where they are, in fact, not warranted, educational programs such as those prescribed by Bereiter and Engelmann, would still not be appropriate for these students. As we have already pointed out, these programs force children to adopt a highly artificial kind of verbal communication, one in which they must attempt to avoid deictic and elliptical forms of language altogether. Such communication forces these children to ignore one of the most salient functions of language, the continuous monitoring of the status of information in the communicative setting. If the information that language expresses is "new," then the processes of ellipsis and deixis can be dysfunctional, as a consequence, they may legitimately be avoided. But if the information is old, then any avoidance of these processes, as we have already shown, may itself be dysfunctional. Indeed, learning how to make appropriate use of deictic and elliptical forms may be considered just as fundamental to the development of communicative competence in children as learning how to make appropriate use of lexically explicit forms. For as children develop communicative competence, they learn not only to provide the listeners with what they need to know, but also to avoid giving them more than they need to know.

Certainly it is pedagogically desirable to make children aware of inappropriate uses of deixis or ellipsis in their verbal communication. Moreover, communication games that teach children the skills required in adopting the other's point of view can be of considerable value in an educational setting (e.g., games in which a solid screen is placed between the interlocutors as in the experiments described above). But using such games as part of a larger program is vastly different from an educational program that forces children, as a matter of principle, to avoid deictic and elliptical forms of language in circumstances where they are, in fact, warranted. It is as if these programs force children, when they speak, to pretend that a solid screen is always present between themselves and their listeners. In effect, the children are required to play a game in the absence of appropriate props. Moreover, they are required to play this game over and over, even though it breaks the rules of the conversational games they play in everyday life.

Summary

In concluding this review of the language deficit position, let us briefly restate the major lines of criticism that we have followed. We first pursued two lines of sociolinguistic criticism already established by language difference proponents:

1. proponents of the language deficit position have used invalid criteria in evaluating the oral performance of urban minority students in school settings (i.e., they have applied norms of written discourse in judging as deficient these students' patterns of oral response);
2. they have failed to investigate the actual repertoire of verbal skills that urban minority students exercise in everyday communication.

We then followed two lines of psycholinguistic criticism, the first one, like the previous two, already established by language difference proponents. However, the second line, which we pursued in much greater depth, has not been developed in any detail in previous criticism:

1. proponents of the language deficit position have assumed that nonstandard forms of language reflect deficient forms of cognition;
2. they have assumed an inadequate theory of reference in evaluating the language of urban minority students.

More specifically, they have not taken sufficient account of the following properties of language in this evaluation:

a) oral language functions as only a single channel in a multichannel system that represents information holistically;

b) the form of language necessarily changes so as to reflect a continuous monitoring of the status of information it represents;

c) the referential functions of lexical as well as deictic forms of language are established only in an immediate context;

d) lexical forms of language may be considered as possessing deictic and nondeictic functions.

As already mentioned, the major tenets of the language deficit position will be reviewed in an article to follow in this series.

NOTES

1. The preceding characterization represents Bernstein's position at the time that language deficit researchers such as Bereiter and Engelmann drew upon it. Since that time his position has changed considerably. Perhaps the most fundamental change is that he now makes a distinction between "codes" and "speech variants," the latter reflecting the constraints of particular communicative contexts such as the "regulative," the "instructional," the "interpersonal," and the "imaginative." Within an interpersonal context, for example, an "elaborated code" may be realized as a "restricted variant." Hence Bernstein no longer posits continuous switching of "codes" as a person moves from one communicative context to another.

2. This double marking of negation, usually discontinuous in form, is an extremely common feature of languages throughout the world; and it is quite common that the two markers, as in the case of nonstandard English where both are /n/=initiated, resemble each other in surface form. In early forms of written English, for example, two or more markers of negation were /n/=initiated, as illustrated in the following sentence from Chaucer: "He *never* yet *no* vileynye *ne* sayde . . . ."

Such discontinuous marking appears to be motivated by the fact that the scope of negation is highly variable in natural languages; that is to say, the element(s) actually subject to negation may vary in a particular predication. Hence what is subject to negation may be enclosed by two markers, thereby creating a more precise expression of the scope of negation, as illustrated by the following examples from Hausa, a widely spoken language in West Africa (the two markers of negation are realized as *ba*):

Positive	Negative
Sun tambaye shi. "They asked him."	(1) Complete Predicate: *Ba* su tambaye shi *ba*. "They didn't ask him."
	(2) Scope Limited to Topicalized Subject: *Ba* su *ba* suka tambaye shi. "It's not they who asked him."
	(3) Scope Limited to Topicalized Complement: *Ba* shi *ba* suka tambayi. "It's not him they asked."

3. A speaker might alter the phrase *on the table* with a certain tone of exasperation, signalling that the listener should have been aware that the book was, indeed, on the table.

4. It should be noted that Hess and Shipman did in fact provide statistical data indicating that children in the lower-class group in their study performed the sorting tasks less well. This lower standard of performance cannot, however, necessarily be accounted for by the less explicit verbal style of interaction between lower-class mothers and children. Any adequate explanation of their lower performance would have to take account of a number of factors, perhaps the most fundamental of which would be their apparently greater unfamiliarity with the nature and purposes of the task they were engaged in.

5. The reductive processes that operate on inner speech are, of course, much more radical than those that operate on public speech. They appear, at times, to produce a kind of "pure predication," in which the subject is continuously rendered obsolete, by virtue of the fact that it is always known. Since the sender of the message is also its receiver, a subject is, in one sense, already old at the actual moment of its encoding.

As Vygotsky observed, the most exacting characterization of the radical reduction of inner speech has come from literature rather than from science. The search for an adequate means of repesenting this reduction, which Vygotsky noted in the work of nineteenth-century writers such as Gogol, has been advanced considerably in the work of twentieth-century writers such as Joyce.

6. Although the analogy is an apt one, it should not obscure the fact that an external point of view is ordinarily signaled, at least to some degree, in a sculpted figure as well. Consider, for example, the external point of view consistently signaled by the decidedly frontal bias in human figures within Greek traditions of sculpture.

7. As illustrated by the research reviewed by Glucksberg, Krauss, and Higgins, the participants do not necessarily share the same point of view in a particular act of verbal communication. As a consequence, the deictic processing may be based on the left-right axis of only one of the participants. Indeed, the speaker and hearer may be so placed that deictic processing anchored in one's point of view would be directly opposed to deictic processing anchored in the other's. As a matter of stylistic convenience, however, the more general term *participant*, contrasting with *field*, will be used rather than the specific terms *speaker* or *hearer*.

8. It may be observed that deictic strategies contrast for the processing of *to the left of* and *in front of*. In the former, the participants construct a spatial field in which the entity functioning as reference point is viewed as possessing an orientation parallel to their own. In the latter, the participants construct a spatial field in which the entity

functioning as reference point is viewed as possessing an orientation opposed to their own. As we will observe later, the strategy in which a parallel orientation is ascribed to the reference point is predominantly used by members of certain cultures for processing locative constructs that represent spatial relations along the frontal axis as well as the sagittal one (i.e., the left-right axis).

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